

# Jesus and the Gospels

**Religion 114****Classroom:** 114 Comenius Hall**Class times:** TTR 12:50-2:00**E-Mail:** radine@moravian.edu**Blackboard** REL114.FA08: Jesus and the Gospels**Professor:** Jason Radine**Office:** 202 Comenius Hall, ext. 1314**Office Hours:** TTR 2:00-3:00

and by appointment.

## Course Content

Jesus is without doubt the most famous historical person worldwide, but in fact he remains an enigmatic, mysterious figure whose meaning and message is hotly debated today. The purpose of this course is to try to answer the following questions:

- 1) What can modern historical methods tell us about Jesus?
- 2) Why do the Gospels present different views of him?
- 3) What can we know about what Jesus *really* thought and said?
- 4) What can we learn from Gospels that did not make it into the Bible?
- 5) What did non-Christian authors from antiquity think about Jesus?

There are not necessarily any single answers to these questions, so we will bring in a variety of viewpoints into the class. In addition to primary sources (the Bible and non-canonical gospels) there are three books assigned that present three different views of the historical Jesus from three serious and historically-committed biblical scholars. These will provide a good sample of the range of opinion on who Jesus was and what he believed and said. Biblical study is a dynamic and ever-changing field, so we can expect new discoveries to appear even in this semester!

## Goals of the Course

1) *An Understanding of the Complexities of the Question of Who Jesus Was:* There are a variety of possible ways of seeing and understanding Jesus, and a major goal of this course is for students to learn about that variety.

2) *Biblical Literacy:* The knowledge of significant figures and ideas in the Bible, biblical literacy is declining in American society even as the Bible continues to be drawn into social and political discussions, often with little knowledge of its actual contents. Students in this course will learn biblical literacy, a vital area of knowledge for full participation in today's public discourse.

3) *The Academic, Scholarly Method of Biblical Criticism:* While many students may be familiar with the methods of reading the Bible in faith communities, this course will introduce the critical methods of modern academic scholarship (see "Approach" below for further details). Students in this course will learn how to use the critical method to uncover the history, ideologies, and theologies in the biblical texts.

4) *Close Reading Skills*: Many of the most interesting and revealing details within the Bible are missed by readers not reading closely. This course will demonstrate the methods of close reading, wherein small details are brought to the surface rather than glossed over. This skill is useful in a virtually limitless range of life tasks.

5) *Analysis of Contrasting Arguments*: This course will be examining the debate on the historical Jesus and the Gospel messages using several well-thought-out theories. Students in this course will enhance their skills in distinguishing these positions and understanding the complex arguments that they bring to the questions. Students will learn how to read sophisticated arguments and come to their own conclusion.

### **Approach**

The approach will be literary and historical, not religious, as the biblical and non-biblical texts will be studied like any other works of ancient literature. This course will employ the scholarly, academic approach of biblical criticism, without privileging any particular religious view. “Biblical criticism” does not refer to negatively criticizing the Bible, but instead to the careful analysis of biblical texts using the most current methods from a variety of disciplines. This approach, used in biblical criticism in colleges and universities around the world, attempts to be as neutral as possible, and to let the biblical texts speak for themselves, even if it runs counter to later religious traditions. While you are not required to agree with the presentations of biblical texts and beliefs in this class, you are required to understand them and be able to demonstrate that understanding in exams.

### **Required Texts**

- 1) The New Revised Standard Version translation of the Bible, with Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books (Oxford University Press).
- 2) *Familiar Stranger: An Introduction to Jesus of Nazareth* by Michael J. McClymond, Eerdmans Publishing, 2004.
- 3) *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* by Bart D. Ehrman, Oxford University Press, 1999.
- 4) *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* by Marcus J. Borg, HarperOne Press, 2006.
- 5) *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts* edited by Ron Cameron, Westminster John Knox Press, 1982.
- 6) Occasional handouts, especially on the non-Christian sources on Jesus that we will be studying at the end of the semester.

## Grading and Class Policies

- 1) Six exams, a mix of essay and short-answer, each worth 12%.
- 2) Weekly take-home essays (typed, 12pt font, double spaced, 1-2 pages), generally assigned on Thursdays and due on Tuesdays. The essays will be based on questions drawn from the textbooks that I will give out. 20% of the grade altogether. Consult the Student Handbook for the academic honesty policy.
- 3) Active, in-class participation: 8%. Cell phones must be silenced in class.
- 4) Readings, which should be done by the day on which they appear on the syllabus; that is, before class.
- 5) Attendance. After two unexcused absences, each further unexcused absence will reduce your overall course grade by one third of a letter. Two times late unexcused counts as one unexcused absence.

## Lecture and Readings Schedule

### Introduction and Background

Introduction August 26<sup>th</sup>

The Jewish Background to the Life of Jesus August 28<sup>th</sup>  
*Readings:* McClymond chapters 1&2

### The Synoptic Gospels

The Gospel of Mark September 2<sup>nd</sup>  
*Readings:* Mark 1-5, McClymond chapters 3&4

The Gospel of Mark September 4<sup>th</sup>  
*Readings:* Mark 6-10, McClymond chapters 5&6

The Gospel of Mark September 9<sup>th</sup>  
*Readings:* Mark 11-16, McClymond chapters 7&8

Gospel of Mark Exam September 11<sup>th</sup>

The Gospel of Matthew September 16<sup>th</sup>  
*Readings:* Matthew 1-9, McClymond chapters 9&10

The Gospel of Matthew September 18<sup>th</sup>  
*Readings:* Matthew 10-19, McClymond chapters 11&12

The Gospel of Matthew September 23<sup>rd</sup>  
*Readings:* Matthew 20-28, McClymond chapters 13

Matthew Exam	September 25 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of Luke <i>Readings:</i> Luke 1-8, Ehrman chapters 1&2	September 30 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of Luke <i>Readings:</i> Luke 9-16, Ehrman chapters 3&6	October 2 <sup>nd</sup>
The Gospel of Luke <i>Readings:</i> Luke 17-24, Ehrman chapters 7&8	October 7 <sup>th</sup>
Luke Exam	October 9 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of John <i>Readings:</i> John 1-7, Ehrman chapters 9&10	October 14 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of John <i>Readings:</i> John 8-14, Ehrman chapters 11&12	October 16 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of John <i>Readings:</i> John 15-21, Ehrman chapters 13&14	October 21 <sup>st</sup>
John Exam	October 23 <sup>rd</sup>
<b>Non-Canonical Gospels</b>	
The Gospel of Thomas Cameron, Borg chapter 1	October 28 <sup>th</sup>
Dialogue of the Savior, Gospel of the Egyptians Cameron, Borg chapter 2	October 30 <sup>th</sup>
Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 840, Apocryphon of James Cameron, Borg chapter 3	November 4 <sup>th</sup>
The Secret Gospel of Mark, Papyrus Egerton 2 Cameron, Borg chapter 4	November 6 <sup>th</sup>
The Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of the Hebrews Cameron, Borg chapter 5	November 11 <sup>th</sup>
The Acts of John, Gospel of the Nazoreans Cameron, Borg chapter 6	November 13 <sup>th</sup>
The Protoevangelion of James, the Infancy Gospel of Thomas	November 18 <sup>th</sup>

Cameron, Borg chapter 7, Ehrman chapter 5		
The Epistula Apostolorum, Acts of Pilate Borg chapter 8		November 20 <sup>th</sup>
Society of Biblical Literature Conference, TBA		November 25 <sup>th</sup>
Non-Canonical Gospels Exam		December 2 <sup>nd</sup>
<b>Ancient Non-Christian Sources on Jesus</b>		
Jewish sources Borg chapter 9		December 4 <sup>th</sup>
Roman Sources Borg chapter 10, Ehrman chapter 4		December 9 <sup>th</sup>
Roman Sources Borg Epilogue		December 11 <sup>th</sup>
Final Exam (Non-Christian sources)	1:30 PM	December 15 <sup>th</sup>